UNITED NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/AC.172/96/Add.7
12 July 1990

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCES
Substantive session
20-29 August 1990
Item 2 (b) of the agenda*

CALENDAR OF CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS

IMPROVED UTILIZATION OF CONFERENCE-SERVICING RESOURCES: MEETING STATISTICS OF UNITED NATIONS ORGANS

ACTION BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCES

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

1. At its 294th and 295th meetings, on 21 August 1989, the Committee on Conferences resumed its consideration of the efficiency with which United Nations organs utilized the conference-servicing resources made available to them. The Committee's consideration was based on a Secretariat report (A/AC.172/88/Add.7) containing meeting statistics of United Nations organs meeting in New York, Geneva and Vienna in 1988.

2. Following a discussion of the document, the Committee decided to request the Chairman to write to the chairmen of bodies that were not considered to have utilized the resources provided to them adequately and to request those chairmen to bring to the attention of the members of the body concerned the contents of her letter (see A/44/32, para. 43).

3. At its organizational meetings for 1990, held from 9 to 12 February 1990, the Committee decided to take up the matter again at its substantive session in August 1990 on the basis of a further statistical report (A/AC.172/88/Add.8). Annex I to the present document contains a list of the bodies to which letters were sent, annex II contains the text of the Chairman's letter to the chairmen of other bodies and annex III contains their replies.

---

* A/AC.172/132/Add.1.

best copy available

Annex I

LIST OF BODIES WHICH ACHIEVED LESS THAN A 75 PER CENT RATE OF UTILIZATION OF CONFERENCE SERVICES AT THEIR 1988 SESSION

(Utilization factor appears in brackets)

A. New York

1. Ad Hoc Committee on the Drafting of an International Convention on the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries (52)

2. Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space: Scientific and Technical Sub-Committee (67)

3. Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean (46.55)

4. United Nations Institute for Training and Research Board of Trustees (70)

5. Disarmament Commission (45)

6. Committee on Contributions (71)

7. Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (58)

8. Committee on Information (43.50)

B. Geneva

9. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (70)

10. Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Population of the Occupied Territories (59)

11. Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space: Legal Sub-Committee (59)

12. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (63); Trade and Development Board (56)

C. Vienna

[No instances of bodies with less than a 75 per cent utilization rate.]

Annex II

LETTER DATED 30 SEPTEMBER 1989 FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCES TO OTHER CHAIRMEN ON THE UTILIZATION OF CONFERENCE-SERVICING RESOURCES

Pursuant to many previous resolutions of the General Assembly, the Committee on Conferences is required to recommend to the Assembly ways of improving the rate of utilization by United Nations organs of the conference resources made available to them. Many such recommendations have, over the years been adopted as General Assembly resolutions, the latest of which, resolution 43/222 A, reads as follows:

"6. Urges those United Nations organs which have failed to make adequate use of the conference-servicing resources provided to them to consider reducing the number of meetings they request in their future programmes of work."

Additionally, at its recently concluded substantive session (21-25 August), the Committee recommended that the General Assembly adopt a resolution at its forty-fourth session which reads as follows:

"4. Again strongly urges those United Nations bodies which have failed to make adequate use of the conference-services provided to them to consider reducing the number of meetings they request in their future programmes of work;

"5. Requests the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences and the Secretary-General to maintain their contacts with United Nations organs that have failed to make adequate use of the conference-servicing resources provided to them in order to assist those organs in making better use of their services;

"6. Recommends that the Chairmen of those organs bring the concerns on utilization of conference-servicing resources to the attention of the organs concerned."

The aim of this and other similar provisions is, as I am sure you will appreciate, to ensure the most efficient and effective use of limited conference resources by eliminating as far as possible avoidable cancellations of meetings. I might add that a significant way of improving utilization is by avoiding, to the extent possible, late starting and early ending of meetings. This aspect of utilization was the subject of much of the discussion in the Committee, and led to some specific recommendations which may prove useful to [...]. a/

In its consideration of this matter, the Committee has reviewed a series of statistical reports prepared at its request by the Secretariat. According to the latest such report, contained in document A/AC.172/88/Add.7, [...] at its 1988 session used [...] per cent of its resources, which falls short of the 75 per cent utilization target set by the Committee in 1983, and reaffirmed in 1989, as a minimum level of efficiency in this area.

During the discussion of that document at its recent session (21-25 August 1989), the Committee expressed its understanding of the reasons as cited for some instances of low utilization of conference resources, and again expressed its wish to benefit from the views of the chairmen of bodies whose utilization factor was less than 75 per cent as to why the bodies concerned had not made more efficient use of the services provided. The Committee therefore decided to again request me, as its Chairman, to communicate with the chairmen concerned, and to solicit their comments in this regard. The Committee further requested that the letter contain a summary of the discussion on utilization which was held in the Committee on Conferences. A copy of document A/AC.172/88/Add.7, and of the relevant paragraphs of the report of the Committee on Conferences is enclosed for your information and for the information of members of your Committee.

Accordingly, I would like to request you to provide me with any information which might assist the Committee on Conferences in formulating appropriate recommendations to the General Assembly on this matter.

Notes

a/ Each letter gave the name and statistics of the committee concerned.

READEX FICHE

Annex III

SUBSTANTIVE PORTIONS OF RESPONSES TO THE LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCES ON THE UTILIZATION OF CONFERENCE RESOURCES

A. Letter dated 11 October 1989 from the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Drafting of an International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries

In connection with your letter dated 30 September 1989 by which you asked for my comments regarding the utilization of conference-servicing resources by the Ad Hoc Committee on the Drafting of an International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries at its 1988 session, I have the honour of informing you as follows.

While it is not my intention to underestimate or deny the valuable contribution of the statistical reports submitted to the Committee on Conferences relating to this matter for the purpose of ensuring a more efficient and effective use of limited conference resources pursuant to the many recommendations of the General Assembly, yet sometimes the statistical figures are not enough to make a judgement of a Committee's work. It would be quite wrong, for instance, to imply that since the Ad Hoc Committee, which I chair, used only 52 per cent of its resources it did not therefore reach even a minimum level of efficiency.

The actual situation of the work of said Committee is rather different. First of all, I would say that the work of the Ad Hoc Committee at its 1988 session (and this is also true for its 1989 session) focused mainly on most intensive informal consultations among its members, which led to the successful elaboration of a negotiating text of a convention in 1988. Consequently, as a result of considerable progress achieved at its 1989 session, the Ad Hoc Committee has been able to submit to the General Assembly draft articles for an international convention on the above-referred subject-matter.

Moreover, because of the positive results obtained at its last session, the Ad Hoc Committee was of the view that efforts could be made to produce the final text of a convention in a relatively short time. This is why the Ad Hoc Committee recommended that the Sixth Committee entrust a working group at this present session of the General Assembly with the task of settling outstanding issues. Accordingly, the Sixth Committee created that Working Group which is currently trying very hard, through formal meetings using resources made available when the Sixth Committee is not holding plenary meetings, but also and I would say mainly through informal consultations among interested delegations, to reach its goal. Notwithstanding what has just been said, it is difficult so far to anticipate the outcome of our present endeavours but I would like to emphasize the very important role played in this kind of exercise by informal consultations which do not utilize conference-servicing resources.

I attach to the present letter the reports of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Drafting of an International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries at its 1988 and 1989 sessions, for your information.

I hope that the above information will be useful to assist the Committee on Conferences in formulating appropriate recommendations to the General Assembly on this matter.

(Signed) Gebre-Medhin HAGOSS

B. Letter dated 9 November 1989 from the Chairman of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space

With reference to your letter of 30 September 1989 regarding the utilization of conference resources, I would like to bring to your attention the reason why the utilization factor of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space was less than 75 per cent of the utilization target in 1988.

As you well know, the Committee takes its decisions on a consensus basis, and in order to reach such a consensus, extensive consultations take place between regional groups as well as individual delegations. These consultations are crucial particularly during the discussion of the report.

However, I am pleased to inform you that at its 1989 session, the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space used nearly 70 per cent of its resources, an improvement from its 1988 utilization of resources.

I will, of course, bring this matter to the attention of the members of the Committee at its 1990 session.

(Signed) Peter JANKOWITSCH

C. Letter dated 10 November 1989 from the Chairman of the Scientific and Technical Sub-Committee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space

With reference to your letter of 30 September 1989 regarding the utilization of conference resources, I would like to bring to your attention the reason why the utilization factor of the Scientific and Technical Sub-Committee was less than 75 per cent of the utilization target in 1988.

As you are aware, the Sub-Committee takes its decisions on a consensus basis and to reach such a consensus, extensive consultations take place particularly in the second week of the session during the discussion of the report.

However I am very pleased to inform you that, according to our figures, at the 1989 session of the Scientific and Technical Sub-Committee, it reached the 75 per cent utilization target set by the Committee on Conferences.

(Signed) John CARVER

D. Letter dated 20 November 1989 from the Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Population of the Occupied Territories

I should like to refer to your letter of 30 September 1989 concerning the use of conference services by United Nations organs.

My colleagues and I are certainly aware that, in spite of our efforts to carry out our mandate to the best of our ability within existing resources, the rate of utilization of conference services made available to the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Population of the Occupied Territories has been below the utilization target set by the Committee on Conferences.

I therefore feel that it might be useful to reiterate the brief description of the Special Committee's mandate and specific activities which I gave last year in the hope that it might contribute to clarify the situation.

The Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Population of the Occupied Territories has had, since its establishment in December 1968, the task of providing the General Assembly with information describing the situation of the human rights of the civilian population in the territories occupied by Israel. These reports are based on oral information received by the Special Committee through testimonies of persons having first-hand experience of the human rights situation in the occupied territories, as well as written information gathered from various sources.

The Special Committee usually meets three times a year. It generally holds its first series of meetings in January at Geneva in order to review developments which have occurred since its last session (August of the preceding year) and to set its annual programme of work subsequent to the renewal of its mandate by the General Assembly; during its second series of meetings held in spring, the Special Committee, in addition to its examination of written information received, organizes hearings for the purpose of collecting oral testimonies in Geneva, Amman, Cairo and Damascus; the third series of meetings of the Special Committee, held in summer, is essentially devoted to an evaluation of the entire material collected during its annual working cycle and to the finalization and adoption of its report to the General Assembly.

The Special Committee had scrupulously sought to ensure maximum utilization of meetings and conference services and has requested meetings only when necessary. Indeed, the provisions made in the statement of programme budget implications to the resolution extending the Special Committee's mandate considerably exceed the

amount of meeting time actually requested by it in recent years. However, the nature of its mandate may sometimes engender delays or modifications in the schedule of work, or even last-minute cancellations of meetings. I refer in particular to the use of oral testimonies as one of the Special Committee's main sources of information, which makes it dependent on individuals whose schedule it is not always possible to determine in advance. Another difficulty stems from the great volume of written information examined by the Special Committee at each of its series of meetings. Such written material, which has to be continuously updated by the Secretariat in order to cover the latest events and their incidence on the human rights situation in the occupied territories, is usually made available to the members of the Special Committee at the very beginning or even in the course of the sessions, thus making it sometimes necessary to modify meeting schedules in order to enable the members to examine the documentation prior to each meeting. These constraints are out of the Special Committee's control in spite of all efforts to make adequate use of conference-servicing resources.

In order to demonstrate that the Special Committee has given very serious consideration to the concern expressed by the Committee on Conferences, I should like to advise you that its forthcoming series of meetings scheduled for January 1990 has, subject to a renewal of the mandate by the General Assembly, tentatively been reduced from the customary length of five to three working days since it can reasonably be expected that this will suffice for the first session in 1990. The Special Committee will continue to review carefully its meeting requirements before each planned series of meetings and proceed in the same manner, in the light of the then prevailing situation.

It is the hope of the Special Committee that, should its mandate again be renewed by the General Assembly at its current session, it be allowed to exercise its functions according to its needs in the framework of the established pattern, taking into account the particular nature of its responsibilities.

(Signed) Daya R. PERERA

E. Letter dated 12 December 1989 from the Chairman of the Legal Sub-Committee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space

Let me thank you very much for your letter of 30 September 1989, addressed to me in my capacity as Chairman of the Legal Sub-Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, concerning the utilization of conference services by the Sub-Committee at its session in 1988.

In this connection, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that, although I was elected Chairman of the Sub-Committee only in 1989, I participated in the 1988 session of that body as a representative of my country. I therefore feel that I am in a position to comment on the contents of your letter, which I appreciate very much.

As you know, the Legal Sub-Committee is a treaty-making body, the work of which is complex, legal in nature, with decision-making based on consensus. The relatively large membership of 53 States and the intricacy of the questions under discussion make the attainment of progress in the Sub-Committee's endeavours a very arduous task.

It would not be an overstatement to say that the main tool for resolving a deadlock, or bridging a serious difference, among delegations on important issues being considered in the Sub-Committee is the holding of informal consultations during which conference services are not used. These consultations are usually undertaken at my initiative, and at very short notice, when I sense that further formal deliberations would be unproductive or counterproductive. It is therefore not possible to give the Department of Conference Services advance notice of the resulting cancellation of the scheduled formal meeting or of early ending of the meeting.

It may be of interest to note that the major achievement at the 1988 session of the Sub-Committee was the selection of a new agenda item of particular significance for developing countries. This achievement was made possible largely through extensive and frequently unscheduled informal consultations, which significantly reduced utilization of conference services resources at that session. My experience both as a delegate and Chairman is that informal consultations are very important working methods of the Sub-Committee, a working method which I am convinced must continue to be used in the future in the interests of achieving progress in the Sub-Committee's work.

I was pleased to note that, as mentioned in your letter, the Committee on Conferences expressed its understanding of the reasons cited for the low utilization in some instances of conference resources. I hope that the Legal Sub-Committee's performance in 1988 was among those instances, and that the above consideration will continue to be taken into account by the Committee on Conferences in formulating appropriate recommendations to the General Assembly.

May I assure you, Madame Chairman, that I shall bring your letter to the Legal Sub-Committee's attention and spare no effort to ensure the efficient utilization of conference services by the Sub-Committee.

(Signed) Stanislav SUJA

F. Letter dated 28 June 1990 from the Chairman of the Committee on Contributions

I have the honour to acknowledge receipt of your letter of 30 September 1989 whose contents were brought to the attention of the members of the Committee on Contributions during the current session of the Committee.

The Committee members and I share the concerns expressed in your letter and make every effort to make maximum use of the conference resources made available to us. However, as the Committee on Contributions is a body of experts which usually

considers a large amount of in-session documentation, late starts, early adjournments and cancellations of meetings are sometimes unavoidable so as to provide Committee members with the opportunity to await the completion of new materials, study them and engage in informal consultations. As there is no pattern to these interruptions of the projected schedule of meetings, advance planning beyond the present level unfortunately does not appear to be possible. I should like to assure you, however, that we will continue our efforts to make the most efficient and effective use of the conference resources reserved for us.

(Signed) Amjad ALI

G. Letter dated 11 July 1990 from the Secretary of the Disarmament Commission

This is in reference to your letter of 30 September 1989 addressed to the Chairman of the Disarmament Commission for 1988, Ambassador Davidson L. Hepburn, regarding the question of underutilization of conference resources.

As instructed by Ambassador Hepburn, I wish to make the following observations, on his behalf, on the problem of underutilization of conference resources at the 1988 substantive session of the Disarmament Commission.

As it is well known, disarmament is a politically sensitive matter, which requires patience and delicate diplomatic skill. Therefore, the actual utilization of meeting services is frequently unpredictable, particularly in the case of negotiations on a consensus text for specific recommendations.

At its organizational session held on 1 December 1987, the Disarmament Commission encountered divergent views concerning the duration of its 1988 substantive session. It decided to hold the session from 2 to 20 May 1988, in view of the convening of the third special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament scheduled from 31 May to 25 June 1988.

Since the Commission did not adopt a precise programme of work for the 1988 session, the Secretariat could not make exact meeting plans to ensure adequate services. Therefore, some cancellations of meetings occurred during the session, when scheduled meetings were no longer considered necessary. This took place mainly at the beginning of the first week and the last week, when the subsidiary bodies were not in working session. Paradoxically, when all the subsidiary bodies were in session, the meeting services available were considered insufficient. In this regard, some delegations proposed additional [meetings with] conference services be held. This recommendation is contained in the report of the Commission (A/42/42).

At the 1988 substantive session, there were eight substantive items before the Commission for consideration and eight subsidiary bodies were established to deal with them. With such a heavy work-load, a large number of meetings for consultations and drafting purposes were held in parallel with the scheduled meetings of the subsidiary bodies. During the session, four simultaneous meetings

were held on regular basis with a view to concluding the items by adopting consensus texts on specific recommendations. It should be pointed out that meetings on subjects regarding reduction of military budgets and confidence-building measures, which were dealt with in consultation groups, were held mostly in an informal manner throughout the session. For certain politically sensitive issues, such as nuclear capability of South Africa, the role of the United Nations in the field of disarmament and naval armaments and disarmament, delegations preferred to negotiate the various proposals in the rolling texts in the informal meetings. This procedure resulted in a number of cancellations of scheduled meetings with conference services. None the less, it should be pointed out that at its 1988 session, the Disarmament Commission successfully concluded two important substantive items and adopted by consensus a set of principles on verification in the field of disarmament and set of guidelines for confidence-building measures. This achievement was hailed by all members of the Commission.

It is clear that underutilization of conference servicing resources at the 1988 session of the Disarmament Commission was due mainly to the cancellation of a number of scheduled meetings. Such cancellations were the result of either disagreement on various issues as reflected in the political positions of certain delegations or for negotiation purposes. It must be borne in mind that the Commission is operating under the practice of consensus, which makes decision-making even more difficult.

Nevertheless, the Chairmen of the Disarmament Commission for 1989 and 1990, Ambassador Bagbeni A. Nzengeya and Ambassador Nana Sutresna, respectively fully share your concern that the Organization should make every effort to maximize the utilization of conference resources. In this connection, I wish to inform you that at its 1990 session, the Commission has adopted by consensus its reform programme entitled "Ways and means to enhance the functioning of the Disarmament Commission" (A/CN.10/137), in which a number of measures for efficient utilization of conference resources are included.

(Signed) Kuo-Chung LIN